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Children Plays and the Problem of Reception

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Abstract

This paper attempts to study the nature of children literature and its two levels of reception: 1) by the grown-ups, who may be their parents, relatives, school teachers, or any other elders, and 2) by the children themselves. The paper will study two children plays: Horace Holley's (1877-1960) *The Genius* (1916) and Rudy Linke's (1958-) *Sasha and the Pearl*, a marionette water play- as examples to test on the reception of these plays by both the children and the grown-ups. While children receive these plays naturally, normally, and blindly believe them, the grown-ups may find them strange, odd, illogical, or even unacceptable to think of the sea-food animals as able to think and speak in the same way adults or grown-ups may think or speak. The nature of dialogues in the children drama, which is adequately Aristotelian, may add a new barricade to the reception of these plays by the grown-ups and adults. The study concludes that orienting the adults and the grown-ups, to these plays, is substantial for the children literature to be familiarized with this kind of literature. The two plays will be studied under the following headings: 1) Reception Theory; 2) Reception of Fairy as a dominant character; and 3) Dialectics of Dialogue Reception.

1. Reception Theory (Rezeptionsasthetik)

The problem of receiving the plays written for children may remind us of the six blind Indians, in the Indian fable adopted by John Godfrey Saxe (1816-1887) in his poem "The Blind Men and the Elephant", which gives different images of the elephant, an animal visually unknown to them. They give six different images of that animal: the first who feels its sturdy side finds it "very like a

wall!"; the second who feels its tusk finds it "very like a spear!"; the third who feels its trunk finds it "very like a snake!"; the fourth who feels its knee is incited to compare it with a mighty plain, says it is " very like a tree!"; the fifth who touches its ear says that the elephant is "very like a fan!"; and the sixth who happens to seize the tail finds that the elephant is "very like a rope!"(<Godfrey Saxe, "The Blind Men and the Elephant", http://www.wordinfo.info/words/index/info/view_unit/>) Everyone of the blind men touches one part, feels one side, or seizes one organ of the elephant and makes his own image of the elephant: "Though each was partly in the right, /And all were in the wrong!" (Ibid). These different images of the elephant are similar to the way children, parents, teachers, classmates, and friends- receive children plays and children literature in general. Everyone receives them in a way which may contradict others'.

The problem discussed in this study is going to be the credibility of the text: are the texts of the plays introduced to children convincing enough to grown-ups, as much as they are convincing to children themselves? Does their credibility suffer when introduced to the grown-ups who may be the parents for

example? If they believe seriously what these texts say, the grown-ups will be able to read them for and teach them to children in different age groups. If not, these texts are indicted with scorning the grown-ups and ridiculing their intelligence. Western Washington University (WWU) has held five conferences on Children's Literature reception organised by professor Nancy Johnson in the years 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, and 2009. (<Nancy Johnson, http://www.wwuclc.com/spkrs_05.asp>) These conferences have hosted key writers, movie producers, and movie directors of children literature. Critics seem to be given less priority in their sessions.

"Reader-response critics have argued that it is readers who make meaning by the activities they perform on texts; they see the reader in the center and thus the privileged position of the work of art is undermined and individual 'readings' become the focus" (*International Companion of Encyclopedia of Children's Literature*: 112). Hence, standardized readings –or criticisms already established- are either reconsidered or simply altered with new readings or criticisms. The diversity of the reader response criticism makes it difficult to pursue a unifying trend of its

development which originated in I. A. Richards's (1893-1979) *Practical Criticism* (1929). Practitioners of reader-response critics include among others: Stanely Fish (1938-), Norman Holland (1927-), Wolfgang Iser (1926-), Ralph W. Rader (1930-), Jonathan Culler (1944-), Eugene Goodheart (1914-), and M. H. Abrams (1912-).

"Reception theory", as proposed by Hans Robert Jauss (1921-1997) will be adopted on studying *Sasha and the Pearl* and *The Genius*. "It focuses on the reader's reception of the text; its prime interest, however, is not on the response of a single reader at a given time, but on the altering responses, interpretive and evaluative of the general reading public over the course of time (Abrams 1993: 272)."

Reception is broadly defined by *Webster's Unabridged Dictionary* in six ways. Definition no.5 reads as "the act of mentally accepting or approving; admission, credence, allowance, as of an opinion or doctrine; sanction" (*Webster's*: 1505). Reception theory, set by Robert Jauss in the 1980s, "represented 'a general shift' in concern from the author and the work to the text and the reader"(Staab: 3). The reception

theorists, led by Jauss, argue that the tradition of reading and receiving a text by the reader is a continuing 'dialectic' or 'dialogue'. Jauss sees that "a literary text possesses no fixed and final meanings or value (Abrams 1993: 273)." *Horizons of expectations* is a literary coinage made by Jauss to compromise between interpretation which ignores history and that which ignores the text in favor of social traditions. These expectations result from what the public already understands about genre and its conventions"(Guerin: 361).

The word "horizon" –as a literary term- is one of the influences of Hans Georg Gadamer (1900-2002) on Jauss. Gadamer's study "Truth and Method", which was published in German in the 1960s and translated into English in 1975, applied this term for the first time. The "horizon", as Gadamer uses and Jauss applies later on, refers to the way in which the reader receives a certain work of art. His reception is not without limits on understanding and interpreting. History, culture, and context have to be involved on making the horizon of expectations of the reader.

This attitude may remind us of T. S. Eliot's (1888-1965) definition of tradition in his masterpiece "Tradition and the Individual Talent"(1920) in which he explained the process of

combining history, culture, and context: "This historical sense which is a sense of the timeless as well as the temporal and of the timeless and the temporal together, is what makes the writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his contemporaniety"(Smith: 715).

Arguing on the reception of meaning, Terry Eagleton sees that the reception of meaning is shaped by the consciousness of the recipient not by the words of the writer. It is similar to the dislocation of souls process. "Meaning is something which the author *wills*: it is a ghostly, wordless mental act which then 'fixed' for all time in a particular set of material signs. It is an affair of consciousness, rather than of words"(Eagleton: 67).

The reader in reception theory is not allowed to come up with interpretations of a text that may seem chaotic. Jauss in his seven horizons of expectations defines the characteristics of "reception" and the qualities of the reader who adopts such a theory. Jauss rejected the *literary fact* of Marxist and Formalistic schools of criticism because the "reader, listener, and spectator- in short, the factor of audience- play an extremely limited role in both

literary theories"(Jauss: 18). He is completely against looking at the reader- in both schools- as "a perceiving object who follows the directions in the text in order to distinguish the [literary] form or discover the [literary] procedure"(Jauss: 18).

The seven theses of the horizon of expectations, proposed by Jauss, may provide answers to the following questions: In what sense does a text exist? To what extent is knowledge subjective or objective? Is the world in which we live culturally constructed or does it have an essential existence? How far is it possible to bridge the gap –historically, culturally, and semiotically- between the reader and the writer? To what extent is interpretation a public act conditioned by the particular material and cultural circumstances of the reader? What is the process of reading like? And what does it entail?

Jauss's first six theses of the horizon of expectations are summarised as:

> "Thesis 1. ... A literary work is not ... not a monument that monologically reveals its timeless essence. It is much more like an orchestration that strikes ever new resonances among its readers and that frees the text from the material of the words and brings it to a contemporary existence. ... Thesis 2. The new text evokes for the reader (listener)the horizon of expectations and rules familiar from earlier texts, which are then varied, corrected, altered, or even just reproduced. ... Thesis 3. ...The way in which a literary work at the historical moment of its appearance, satisfies, surpasses, disappoints, or refutes the expectations of its first audience obviously provides a

> criterion for the determination of its aesthetic value. ... Thesis 4. The method of historical reception is indispensable for the understanding of literature from the distant past. ... Thesis 5. The theory of the aesthetics of reception not only allows one to conceive the meaning and form of a literary work in the historical unfolding of its understanding. It also demands that one insert the individual work into its 'literary series' to recognise its historical position and significance in the context of the experience of literature. ... Thesis 6. The achievements made in linguistics through the distinction and methodological interrelation of diachronic and synchronic analysis are the occasion for overcoming the diachronic perspective- previously the only one practiced- in literary history as well. ..."(Jauss: 18-45)

Thesis 7 which reads as "the social function of literature manifests itself in its genuine possibility only where the literary experience of the reader enters into the horizon of expectations of his lived praxis, performs his understanding of the world, and thereby also as an effect on is social behaviour. ..."(Jauss: 43) is introduced separately. It stands as the most applicable thesis to the plays studied in this paper.

In thesis 1, Jauss invites his readers to introduce their own interpretations of a text giving them freedom to read it regardless of the previous interpretations and readings of this text. The previous interpretations are responses conditioned by the cultural circumstances of the period. Jauss thinks of the literary text as if it were having gaps in its texture and the reader is to fill them in. That's why the word 'orchestration' is used to indicate the new

'resonances' or receptions of the reader. Jauss calls on his readers to be free from the responses that are affected by the 'material of the words' to have their contemporary reading of a text. This reminds us of the contemporaniety of the author, as well as, of the text described by T. S. Eliot on pages 5-6 of this paper. Thesis 2 gives the reader the right to 'vary, correct, alter, or even just reproduce' his own rules based on earlier texts and the text being read. Thesis 2 may help us understand Sasha, a young girl in *Sasha and the Pearl*, who behaves as a grown-up. She surprises us with her attempts to achieve the others' will. In addition, thesis 2 helps us understand the attitude of the Boy in *The Genius* who seems to share the same experience with the Old Man. The Old Man presents the Boy as a means of psychological projection. He disregards the factors of age and experience on thinking of the Boy as a source of relief for himself. Thesis 3 shows that Jauss seems to be quite dissatisfied with the previous readings and receptions of a text. He is against the 'determination of the aesthetic value.' This is a clear reference to Formalism which concerned itself with the form of the text and its linguistic aesthetics. Thesis 4 deals with the role of history in shaping our present response. History, as used by

Jauss, is the history of critical readings of a work of art. Our present day reception of a work of art is to be incorporated with the existing 'historical' readings of the past. History is, therefore, a catalyst that contributes to a quick reaction between the reader and the text. Thesis 5 glorifies the role of the reader: the aesthetics of perception theory allow the reader to reach the meaning of the text through interaction between history of readings and the reader's own 'individual work' or individual reading. This will provide new "significance in the context of the experience of literature." Thesis 6 deals with the 'diachronic perspective', which refers to the previous readings of literature, versus the 'synchronic' reading which is only one reading at a certain time of history regardless of the coming interpretations and receptions. Jauss seems to be encouraging his readers to introduce new versions of interpretations of a text. Thesis 7 gives a new perspective of the social function of literature. This function manifests itself only when the reader responds to it positively. The living 'praxis' –or the living experiences- of the reader will determine the social value of literature. If the experiences of the indicated author are accepted by the receiving reader, the social function of a text is maintained.

Moreover, the new experience will have its effect on the social behaviour of the reader.

The future of Reading literature, in the light of "reception theory" after Jauss, is mainly the production of textual meaning by the reader who seems to be fascinated by "speculations regarding the mind and language"(Hamilton & Schneider: 1). Consequently, Iser's version of reception theory has been less common in the German universities than in the Anglo-American ones. Wolfgang Iser and Stanely Fish, in the 1980s –though guided by Jauss and his horizon of expectations- had repeated the question as related to finding out the meaning, "Was it in the text, in the reader, in the author, or in the messy interaction of all three? Iser, Fish claimed, had no answers"(Hamilton & Schneider: 1)

2. The Reception of the fairy as a Dominant Character

In *Sasha and the Pearl*, the problem of the heroine Sasha is that she wants to find her mother a pearl to put in a necklace "to show all the ladies at the dance!" Although the husband sees this thing as a "show off", he approves his wife of the right to dream about such a thing. But, as the only bread-winner of that family,

having Sasha as the only daughter, the husband is seemingly reluctant to listen to this wish expressed by his wife. He "can hardly afford to buy" her a new dress as he will like (*Sasha*, Act I).

This wish of the Mom triggers the adventurous spirit in Sasha, "Poor Mommy! She wants a pearl necklace and we can't afford to buy one. How I wish I could get her one ! Oh, I wish and wish! And then I'd wish and wish and wish some more!" (*Sasha,* Act I). The repetition of the word 'wish' seven times in a short sentence like this calls up the Wish Magic Fairy who is received by Sasha as the only person who can provide her with a one-step solution for her problem, "You have brought me a pearl necklace for my Mom? That's wonderful!" (*Sasha*, Act I). But the Fairy does not. Had the Fairy brought her the pearl necklace, there would be no plot at all. The arrival of the Fairy amplifies and enlarges the problem of Sasha. Sasha understands that the Fairy comes with the pearl. In fact it comes with a challenge for Sasha: to work hard is the only way to get the pearl, "I can't fulfill your wishes. Only you can fulfill your wishes. It's the way things are" (*Sasha*, Act I). This pragmatic answer represents the guidelines for Sasha to find the pearl necklace for her mother. It represents, as well, a logical

answer that serves a sublime idea: man has to work in order to fulfill himself and his own wishes. The idea may be accepted by the grown-ups, but is hardly accepted by children. She feels that it is difficult for her to work at this age, "Then why have you come? If you don't have a necklace, why are you here? (*Sasha*, Act I)". Sasha's behavior is in line with child behavior "not yet adapted to the man-made world" (Randy White). But the Magic Fairy is introduced as a character that dominates over Sasha, the only human being who is in contact with the Fairy.

The Fairy, pragmatically, gives her logical answer, "To show you how to use your wish magic" (*Sasha*, Act I). This answer may be well received by the grown-up reader or audience as it is within the framework of values related to life on Earth. Man knows for sure that work is an endless job till his life is terminated. There is no way for modern man to believe in using supernatural powers to earn his living. But the Fairy's answer about work comes as a surprise to Sasha.

As a child who has no idea about work, Sasha proposes that the Fairy *make* her one. But when the Fairy rejects this proposition, Sasha suggests that the Fairy *find* her one. Morally speaking,

making and finding are different words to express two different functions. To *find* as understood by Sasha is to steal one from the jewelry, "I know where one is and I could take..."(*Sasha*, Act I). But she is interrupted by the Fairy, "No, no. That would be stealing and would be wrong" (*Sasha*, Act I). Then the Fairy starts guiding her on how to find the pearl through a series of questions and answers that are all based on logical grounds of the didactic dialogue between human beings.

> Fairy: Where do pearls come from?
> Sasha: Oh, I know that one! From the sea.
> ...
> Sasha: How do I use my wish magic? (*Sasha*, Act I)

The Fairy tells Sasha, 1) to put her wishes in three magic stones, 2) to hold them tightly, and 3) to start wishing, "Oh, I wish. I wish. I wish"(*Sasha*, Act I). Sasha's instinct for learning is now excited, "How do I use my wish stones?"(*Sasha*, Act I). The Fairy, realizing that her pupil is well-trained in the school of work value as a means for living, says, "Go to the sea and once there, take one of your stones and make a wish to breathe under water like a fish. Then you can swim down, and claim your pearl. But, remember, you need to change back to breathe again once you are done"(*Sasha*, Act I). Sasha feels grateful for her trainer and teacher to life who

immediately answers, "Don't thank me too soon, child. Life is an adventure and your adventure has just begun" (*Sasha*, Act I). Then Sasha embarks on her first step: to leave her parents' house. Next, she will be arrested by the guards of His Majesty the King Lobster.

Children, at this stage, have an attitude to believe and live in a world of imagination of their own. This is a means "to link imagination to the real world. This is the age of imaginary friends, caves made of chairs and sheets and civilizations of cardboard and sand . The process of the fantasy is an end in itself, and must be scripted by the child from his or her imagination" (Randy White).

3. Dialectics of Dialogue Reception

Sasha, becomes an underwater girl after she escapes from her parents' house to find her mother a pearl necklace. Correspondingly, the hero Boy in *The Genius* escapes from his father's house to find the author of his beloved volume of poetry. He puts forth a lot of endeavor to find the author's house. The Boy and the author, gradually, get to understand each other. The Man – the author- has a long story of failure in life that forces him to desert life in the big city and to come and live in the countryside to sit under the trees surrounding his house. To both, the trees are a

reminder of *The Old Testament*, the spiritual, and religious worlds. The Old Man -in *The Genius*- does not practice or use any magical powers to dominate over the Boy. His well-versed dialogues with the Boy represent a dominant element in the play that shape the progress of events.

The Boy, in a similar way to Sasha's, wants to have bright guidelines to reform his life. Therefore, he comes to the author's house. It is an ordinary old house on the outskirts of one of the American villages. The garden is the arena of events in *The Genius*. To the Boy, "The garden environment as a children's place, rather than someplace designed for adults. Children see it as a world separate from that of adults , and one that responds to their own sense of place and time" (Randy White). This symbolizes the writer's peripheral role in modern man's life. Therefore, the Man in *The Genius* is alienated. The Boy likes "to sit under these trees." Sitting there makes him "think of *The Old Testament*." Sasha thinks that having the three stones will provide her with everything to get the pearl necklace. The Fairy corrects her saying that the three stones are only the beginning. Similarly, sitting under the trees, though a reminder of *The Old Testament*, is not quite

fulfilling for the Boy in *The Genius*, " ... the big thing they are doing seems to be the answer beforehand. But it isn't! Not compared with *The Old Testament*. So we have to ask it for ourselves. And that's why I came here..."(*The Genius*). Sitting under the trees starts a thorough investigation in the impulses of both the Man and the Boy: why do they both come to sit under these trees? "Outdoor environments with natural things have three qualities that appeal to children: their unending diversity; the fact that they are not created by people ; and their feeling of timelessness- the landscapes, trees, rivers described in fairy tales and myths still exist today" (Randy White). The grown-up reader "shares with the writer of the text certain conventions governing the practice of the language which enable him to understand what, on this primary level, the writer took to say" (Abrams 1989: 349).

There may be no reservations for the Old Man coming to the countryside to sit under the old trees that denote a solution for his failures and disappointments in life. Therefore, the reader's response to this situation is positive. This response may be seen as an application of Jauss's thesis 7 which discusses the role of receiving the work of art as related to its social function. It is

applied in the reading of the two plays of this study. The Old Man attempts to locate someone who may respond to his own 'praxis' – experience in life. The interaction between the Old man and the Boy represents a means to understand the world and shape the social behavior of the Man and the Boy.

Our reception of the Boy and Sasha may be oriented by the logical reception of their dialogues with the other characters in the two plays. The questions raised by Sasha and the Boy seem quite logical and dialectical. We have to give up the fact that they are children to accept and conceptualize their dialogues. If we keep in mind that they are children, our reception will tend to reject their logical questions assuming that coming of age is the only factor to bring about such dialectics in a dramatic dialogue. The Boy, who is not old enough to be as disappointed and as frustrated as the Old Man, comes to sit under these trees to find out the way for a correct beginning of life. This is similar to the status of Sasha in *Sasha and the Pearl* who is very happy to find a beginning. This is his outdoor world which includes: "water; vegetation, including trees, flowers and long grasses; animals, including fish, fogs and other living things; sand; natural color; places and different features to sit in,

on, under, and lean against, and provide shelter and shade; structures, equipment and materials that can be changed, actually or in their imagination"(Randy White).

Sasha has her own problem: to find and make her mother a pearl necklace. The King Lobster, also, has a problem: his only daughter Princess Veena is kidnapped by the Water Witch and he wants her back. In *The Genius*, we have something similar to this. The Boy and the Man come to sit under the trees to have a way out of themselves. They seem to be prisoners of a worry that forces them to wonder for a solution. We understand that the Man has a problem with his wife: she considers him brilliant and she wants him to be brilliant all the time. The Boy, on the other hand, wants to talk to his favorite poet whom he has been trying to find for years.

Against the expectations of his wife, the Man in *The Genius*, sees himself as a "sick child" who wants his wife to look after him. These two diverse visions of himself as "a brilliant" great man and "a sick child" tortured him. These two visions are incompatible and unapproachable.

> I couldn't play the part of "brilliant" young poet with any success. She was at me all the while to write more of the same thing. And I didn't want to. The difference between the "great" man I was supposed to be and the sick child I really was, began to torture. I knew I oughtn't to go on any further if I wanted to do anything real. ... And when I realized that either she would never understand or would despise me, I grew desperate. I wrote her a note, full of fine phrases about "incompatibility," her "unapproachable ideals," the "soul's need of freedom"—things she would understand and wear a heroic attitude about—and fled. I came here. ... (*The Genius*)

On the other hand, the Boy –at the beginning- has a blurred vision of life. He comes to sit under these trees to meet the poet, and hence, finds a way out of himself not knowing that his expected survivor is in need of someone to rescue him. "...when I was just a boy, the world seemed full of everything, but now it seems to have only one thing. That or nothing. ...Then I found your book, with the same picture in it. You bet I read it right off! It was the first time in my life I had ever felt power as great as skyscrapers and railroads and yet apart from them. Outside of all they mean. Like the Old Testament. Those poems!" As readers who try hard to construct a coherent sense from the text, we "will select and organize its elements into consistent wholes, excluding some and foregrounding others, 'concretizing' certain items in certain ways." Also, we try to "hold different perspectives within the work together, or shift from perspective to perspective in order

to build up an integral whole" (Eagleton: 77). Although this conclusion is not an equivalent to Jauss's thesis 3- in which the reception of a literary work at the historical moment of its appearance "satisfies, surpasses, disappoints, or refutes the expectations of its audience"- provides an aesthetic aspect of reception.

The comparison between the poems of the Man and *The Old Testament* may remind us of Sir Philip Sidney's (1554-1586) article "Defense of Poesie" (1595) in which he concludes that the Holy Scriptures are formed in verse and that the prophets are poets. "Such were , *David* in his Psalmes, *Salmon* in his Song of Songs, in his Ecclesiastes, and Proverbs: *Moses* and *Bebora* in theyr Hymnes, and the writer of *Job*; which beside other, the learned *Emanuell Tremlius* and *Franciscus Junius*, doe entitle the poeticall part of the Scripture. Against these none will speake that hath holie Ghost in due holy reverence"(Smith: 60). The Man -contrary to the Boy- found out that sitting under the trees provides him with salvation. The Boy sees that sitting under the trees is not adequately enough to provide salvation for himself, "... Well, I was a wreck when I came here, I wanted only to lie down under a

tree.... And there it was, under that tree yonder, my salvation came"(*The Genius*).

The "other's will" is the moving force that gives action its velocity needed to move towards the plot. In the case of the Man in *The Genius*, the 'other's will' is responsible for making him a famous writer in his society and a brilliant person in the eyes of his young wife who feels proud to be married to a famous writer. Surprisingly, he discovers that he has written nothing for the year he stayed in the village under the trees. His wife , the moving power, is no more with him. The will that is used to force him to write is now lacking. "All the 'brilliance' had faded away; I was as simple as a blade of grass. For a year I didn't write a word. I had the courage to wait for the real thing, nobody pestering me to be a 'genius'! Some day you may read that first book. People said I had re-discovered the virtue of humility. I had" (*The Genius*).

The Man in *The Genius* seems to be in need of some magic stones–similar to Sasha's- which he may use to fulfill the others' wills: one for his wife's wishes to have a famous man beside her, one for himself to have the virtue of humility, and a third to maintain some compatibility with his community. Sasha, in Sasha

and the Pearl, uses the three stones excellently: the first to reach Oyster Kingdom to collect a pearl, the second to go up to the water to breathe, and the third to save the Lobster King's daughter Princess Veena. Sasha says to the King, "I can't leave you like this. I have two wish stones left. One I need to breathe again so I can go home to mom and dad. I have an extra wish and maybe I can use it to help your daughter" (*Sasha*, Act II, Scene II).

The Man in *The Genius* realizes that life without the other is impossible. The other's will represents the force that moves him toward good or bad objectives. Although he objects to this kind of motive in life, he feels that such a motive is necessary for fulfilling his own and the others' wills. There and then, his soul is tortured. "We can't live in a vacuum. The more you feel the force, the more you must act. The more you can act. And in the long run it doesn't matter what you do, if you do what your own instinct bids" (*The Genius*). The Boy comes to the village and the trees with a great worry: "a way of preventing anybody from being poor. It seems so unnecessary, with so much work being done. That's what I want to do. Thanks to you, I-"(*The Genius*). This is a typical philosophical

worry which may be accepted if expressed by a philosopher not a young boy like the one we have in *The Genius*.

Sasha, in turn, tries to find means to make the others happy. She risks her life to save Princess Veena, the Lobster King's daughter who is kidnapped by the Water Witch. Sasha endangers her life when the Water Witch threatens to eat her in addition to Veena, "Oh, poor princess. I can't let you be eaten" (*Sasha*, Act III). Although Sasha knows that throwing the last magic stone to save Veena will render her coming back -to her parents- impossible, she throws her last magic stone to freeze the Water Witch in time. On saving Veena, she gives Sasha a beautiful pearl necklace. Sasha is, also, given a good number of magic stones which will enable her to revisit Princess Veena any time in the future.

The worries of both the Man and the Boy in *The Genius* are philosophical, but the Man tends to be more philosophical due to age and experience. The Man escapes from his wife to fulfill himself, but he has not escaped from all women. He announces that man cannot live in a vacuum; without women. He escapes from the wrong woman in his life. He is looking for a pearl to crown the

new stage of his life in the same way Sasha has been looking for a pearl to put in her mother's necklace for the dance. Both are not looking for pearls for reasons of show. They want to fulfill the others' wills regardless of their being showy or not. They want to prove themselves able to be helpful to their communities. "You thought because I left one woman and hadn't found another that I didn't care for women? Others believe that, too, but it isn't so. On the contrary. You see, I didn't so much leave her as get away from my own failure" (*The Genius*).

Although the Man knows that he is talking to a boy, the first – didactically- gives the latter an original lesson on kinds of women. The wrong woman in man's life destructs him while the right one "multiplies" him in the sense that she will change his life into stages of success and achievement. "Of course, there is such a thing as the wrong woman. She makes a man a fraction. The better she is in herself, the less she leaves him to live by. One twentieth is less than one half. But the right woman! She multiplies a man ..." (*The Genius*).

This great discourse on nature of the wrong woman and the right woman may address married persons only, whether they have

problems with their spouses or not. It, also, may address men who are planning to get married soon. Therefore, it may be well received by these categories. But a young boy will encounter a number of difficulties in order to understand the difference between the right woman and the wrong woman. His reception tools will not be able to conceive this classification of women into "right" and "wrong". The Boy's vision of the woman –in a conservative society suggested by references to *The Old Testament*- may be confined to her being a mother, a small sister, a nanny, a nurse, or the like decent forms of vision of women. We are not doing things as we like with the text. Norman Holland sees that the text is an independent body, "it exists as an object and as the expression of another mind, something different from readers themselves, something they can project onto" (Guerin: 363). David Bleich, who substantiates the role of the reader in understanding the text "denies that the text exists independent of readers" (*Ibid.*: 363).

Conclusions

This paper attempts to study two children plays: Rudy Linke's *Sasha and the Pearl* and Horace Holley's *The Genius* in the light of

their reception by both the children and their elder grown-ups. The study reaches the following conclusions:

- Children receive these plays well because fantastic, supernatural, and unusual things are accepted by children as a means to understand our real world and to concretize it.
- Grown-ups may find that these plays attempt to scorn them and ridicule their intelligence. Meantime they have to receive them and accept them as a means for teaching their children extramural lessons.
- In *Sasha*, on the one hand, the grown-up questions are all based on this proposition: seafood animals speak, argue, and behave in a way similar to that of the grown-ups.
- This intellectually oriented behaviour of the seafood animals may be ignored, abhorred, and even disbelieved by the grown-ups assuming that intellectual thinking is one of the characteristics of human beings only.
- The Boy in *The Genius*, on the other hand, goes into deep analytical and intellectual debates with the Old Man. They both ask questions that are answered logically showing a lot of experience in life and man. These questions are,

thematically accepted when they are raised by the Old Man who is a poet of sixty years old age. We feel surprised, as grown-ups, to find that the Boy who is a teenager gives answers that are superbly reasoned out and identical with the highbrows'.

- *Sasha*, as a marionette for children, is not only for fun and fantasy. It teaches them a good moral lesson: to maintain your wishes, you have to work hard for them. Dreaming about maintaining something is not enough. Children have the right to dream but they have to work hard to verify them. That is why the Water Fairy asked Sasha to use the three magic stones to get her mother a pearl necklace.
- The Boy in *The Genius* is introduced as an adequate equivalent for the psychoanalyst or the psychiatrist. The poet/hero talks to the Boy about problems of a mature believing that the Boy will never fail to conceptualise what is narrated to him. Therefore, the Boy stands for the source of psychological relief in *The Genius*.

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"مسرح الطفل و إشكالية التلقي"

ملخص البحث

تحاول الدراسة أن تعالج تلقى المسرحية المكتوبة للطفل عند الكبار. الأطفال يحبون الأسلوب الذي تكتب به مسرحياتهم و رواياتهم و ما يوظف فيه من: سحر، وحيوان، ونبات، و شخوص بلا أسماء، و أماكن مفتوحة و معزولة. أما الكبار فان لديهم ميل لمعرفة أسماء من يحيطون بهم و كذلك الأشياء التي يتعاملون معها. لذا فان اسم الشخص في مسرحية الطفل يصطدم بمنطقية الأشياء عند الكبار بينما عند الأطفال لا يقع هذا الصدام حيث أن عالم المنطق عندهم لم يتكون بعد. و بعكس اعتقاد الكبار فان اللامنطق عند الطفل هو الأساس؛ فالحيوان يتكلم و يفكر و يغنى و يبكى و يحزن، و حيوانات طعام البحر تتحدث و تحكى تجاربها في حوار أرسطي صريح كأنه بين كبار بالغين كما نرى في المسرحية، ذات الثلاثة فصول، *ساشا و عقد اللؤلؤ* لرودى لنكه. كما نقرأ حواراً منطقياً فلسفياً بين شاب يافع و كاتب قارب الستين كما في المسرحية ذات الفصل الواحد *العبقري* لهوراس هولى. أما الكبار فلا يرون أن هذا يخضع لمنطقهم ومن ثم تطرأ مشكلة قبولهم لهذه الأعمال. بذا تظل في مخيلتهم فانتازيا لاتتعدى حدود أنها كتبت لسن طفولى معين لا منطقية في تفكيره و لا منطقية في فحصه و قبوله للأشياء.